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NATIONALITY IN GARDENING

BY CONSTANCE M. VILLIERS-STUART

(Continued from May number)

III

IT was Charlemagne, after his successful wars against the Saracens, Lombards, and Saxons, who first made a northern garden. At his palace of Nieder Ingelheim on the Rhine, which he decorated with a hundred columns of Italian marble, he took the greatest interest in agriculture and horticulture. There he wrote his capitulary, 'De villis et curtis,' one of the most valuable and detailed documents relating to the art of gardening in these early centuries. He recommended that his subjects should grow fruit-trees and medicinal herbs, as well as various ornamental plants. His own palace gardens, like the cloistered paradises of the East, of which he had no doubt heard, contained, among other treasures, a remarkable collection of beasts and birds. It was about this time—while 'Abd-er-Raham was laying out his splendid pleasure grounds at Cordova—that a more famous contemporary, the Kalif Haroun-al-Raschid, sent the Christian Emperor a present of an

elephant to add to his menagerie. Considering the size of the gift, and the difficulty of the journey from Baghdad to the Rhine, one would like to know how it got there.

The tenth century, a period of such civilisation in Moorish Spain, was one of marked depression over the rest of Europe. The religious communities, almost alone, had the necessary protection or the time to turn their energies towards gardening. During these darkest years of Christendom it was the monastery walls that sheltered such learning as was left, and its fields and gardens made an oasis in the wild. In every country, horticulturists owe more to the monasteries than is generally supposed.* The

* In China many species would have completely disappeared but for monastic care. The most striking example is the survival of the maidenhair tree—*Ginkgo biloba*—which, although no longer to be found wild, is so closely associated with temple courts and shrines. This beautiful tree is a relic of a very early flora. It flourished during the secondary period, and it has been said that its fossil remains can be traced back to the primary rocks.

medieval monks not only did much to protect gardening and other peaceful arts, but to their ardent preaching was due the great adventure of the Crusades, which brought the West as a whole once more into touch with Asia. The Christian knights and pilgrims who lived to reach the Holy Land were amazed at the civilisation and culture of Islam. All the European arts benefited by this contact and its stimulus, and a special impulse was given to gardening.

The travellers brought back strange new trees and plants. Many hitherto unknown fruits and flowers reached Europe for the first time in this way, such as the Persian rose, and the old-fashioned damask rose, or rose of Damascus. The spring glories of the Eastern parterres, the tulip, hyacinth, fritillary, ranunculus, and lilac were not left behind, and the jasmine, next to the rose in Oriental favour, reached Europe from Arabia by way of Spain.

With the new importations came something of their former symbolism; for even in its details gardening, like every other Eastern art, had its symbolic as well as its practical meaning and arrangement, and these memories clung to the transplanted flowers. Moslem attributes and Persian floral fancies became emblems of the Christian virtues, and were included in the heraldry of the saints. Glowing roses typified the fire of missionary zeal; the azure fleur-de-lis suggested the calm of celestial contemplation, 'which aspires above the sky up to th' immortal choir.' The Rosa Mariae, the Rose of Jericho, was believed by the pilgrims to the Holy Sepulchre to have sprung up at each resting-place on the flight into Egypt. It was said to have blossomed for the first Christmas, to have closed at the Crucifixion, and re-opened on Easter Day. The white iris, sacred to

the Madonna, was the flower of hope, light, and power. Its threefold petals represented the Trinity and the virtues of faith, wisdom, and valour. In Spain the lily had been adopted by the Knightly Order of Our Lady of Old Time as their crusading device. Henceforward the Lilies of our Lady became the special mark of Andalusian design, and the jar or vase with the two-branched lily springing from it was known as the 'Heraldic Arms of the Virgin.' The sacred lotus, worshipped as the flame of life from the earliest time, found in this guise a way into Christian art and legend; while the vase holding the lilies took the place of the lota, or Waterpot of the World, from which the Indian flower sprang. Some Spanish artists even went so far as to paint the Virgin sitting on a water-lily, like Buddha, wrapped in meditation, floating on his Lotus of the Good Law.

In Provence, whence the first crusade set out, the songs of the troubadours kept alive and carried on the old traditions of the Valley of the Rhone. Life in a feudal castle, if occasionally dangerous, was for the most part monotonous enough, especially for the chatelaine left behind. She and her ladies must have welcomed the resources of poetry, embroidery, and the delights of their herb-garden. What the castle 'verger' was like may be gathered from passing references in chronicles of the time, or, better still, seen in illuminated breviaries, missals, and Books of Hours. The enclosure, being carefully hidden away within the fortifications, was necessarily small. Its chief object and architectural ornament was a high stone fountain, a slender, elegant structure, closely resembling an old English village cross. Encircling its steps and basin were rows of small raised beds, filled with flowers, and sometimes edged with tiny wooden rails. Wattle

hedges covered with climbing roses divided the garden into separate parts, and a low narrow terrace, planted with herbs or turfed to sit and rest on, ran round the outer walls.

For a time Italian craftsmen were content to follow those of France, but the influence did not last. The imaginative flowers of Gothic art soon flagged in Italy; they failed to take root in the old Roman soil. The rival churches of the Dominican and Franciscan friars are often the only Gothic buildings to be seen in an Italian town. All through the troubled dream of the centuries, the craftsmen's ears caught faint recurring echoes of a glorious Pagan past. It was owing to the recovery of classic learning that the country's supremacy in the other arts was gained. With the Renaissance in Italy the gay, careless gods returned. Pan woke from his long sleep in the ilex woods, and peeped over the medieval castle walls. Cupid and Ceres, Flora and the tree nymphs, followed him as he leapt into the garden and laughed as they chased the wan saints, and drove the wyvern and other monstrous beasts of heraldry from their home. The fall of Constantinople quickened the awakening interest in ancient life and thought. The influence from the East was, this time, Greek rather than Oriental. The treasures of the newly recovered classics, brought into Italy by the Greek scholars who fled before the conquering Turks, were eagerly searched for references to the architecture of old times. More settled conditions aided the revived taste for country life. Villas sprang up and dotted the hillsides within reach of every principal town. The merchant nobles of the powerful northern cities vied with each other and with the cardinals and princes of Rome in the splendour of their pleasure-grounds. Then, as now, gar-

dening became the fashion of the day. So well and daringly designed, so solid in their sound construction, so vast their plan, the gardens of the Italian Renaissance are many of them practically unchanged. It was the spell of the distance, that love of looking down from a height—a feeling Italian builders shared with those of Persia—as much as an inherited sense of form, that saved the gardens.

Seen for the first time, the old gardens of Italy are disappointingly devoid of flowers. Amid the cool greens and greys of a northern landscape, the English pleasance strikes a welcome, warm, bright note. Beneath the intense blue skies of Italy life runs in different grooves, and the law of contrast demands and deepens other charms.

Only under a cloudless sky can house and garden be so intimately combined that to step through shady portico and pillared loggia into the open air is but to pass from one set of rooms to another; to exchange the fading glories of the dim salon, with its mirrored frescoes and carvings, for parlours whose chandeliers are crystal fountains, and whose walls are hung with fine green tapestries of box. Each pleasant month from spring, until autumn brings the vintage, has a corner of its own, on the terraces that plunge into the valley or climb the steep mountain flank, till ordered formality vanishes in the wild chestnut woods. And everywhere through the garden the water throbs and flows; not with the tranquil, purposeful beauty of the East, but with a restless Western magic of its own; dripping ceaselessly over dark, fern-lined grottoes; pouring through great jars which struggling Cupids try to hold aloft, or rushing down carved cascades. Empty urns and broken statues, crumbling steps and sweeping balustrade, cut

out of the rough fawn tufa stone, alone relieve the blue of sky and water and the dark prevailing forest green. Fine as the Italian gardens are, it is not so much in actual grandeur of form or glow of colour as in the subtle force of contrast and unexpectedness, in imagination, and in poetry that they reign supreme.

Among the romantic valleys of Italy, with their rapid streams and pine-clothed rocky slopes, a scheme worked out in a splendid series of terraces had become the garden-builder's aim. But in France, when the native designer was partly freed from this influence and began to choose for himself, he chose—as his works and his books tell us,—for preference, 'le niveau parfait.' In a land of great trees and tranquil rivers, of dense wooded areas and far-extending plains, the French gardener was right. Drive up one of the long triple avenues which form the *pâte d'oie* and meet in a circle before the forecourt of the château; enter the main building and, passing through the tall, narrow windows of the salon, step out on the *perron* of the garden front, and you will see how right he was. From the top of the shallow flight of steps the great parterre bursts into view; at first just a maze of colour, backed and enriched by its dark, shadowy boundary of trees, through which delightful woodland alleys give a breath of open distance, or a glimpse of springing fountain, or of placid passing stream. Nearer at hand, the forest, tamed and clipped, throws up in luminous distinctness the white statues filling its green niches, and the rows of flower-decked vases on the low stone balustrade. Serene and calm, a pool of magic colours lost in an enchanted wood, the garden lies, until slowly the form of the parterre begins to take shape, when, with its free-swinging curves and interlacing ovals, its intricate delicacies

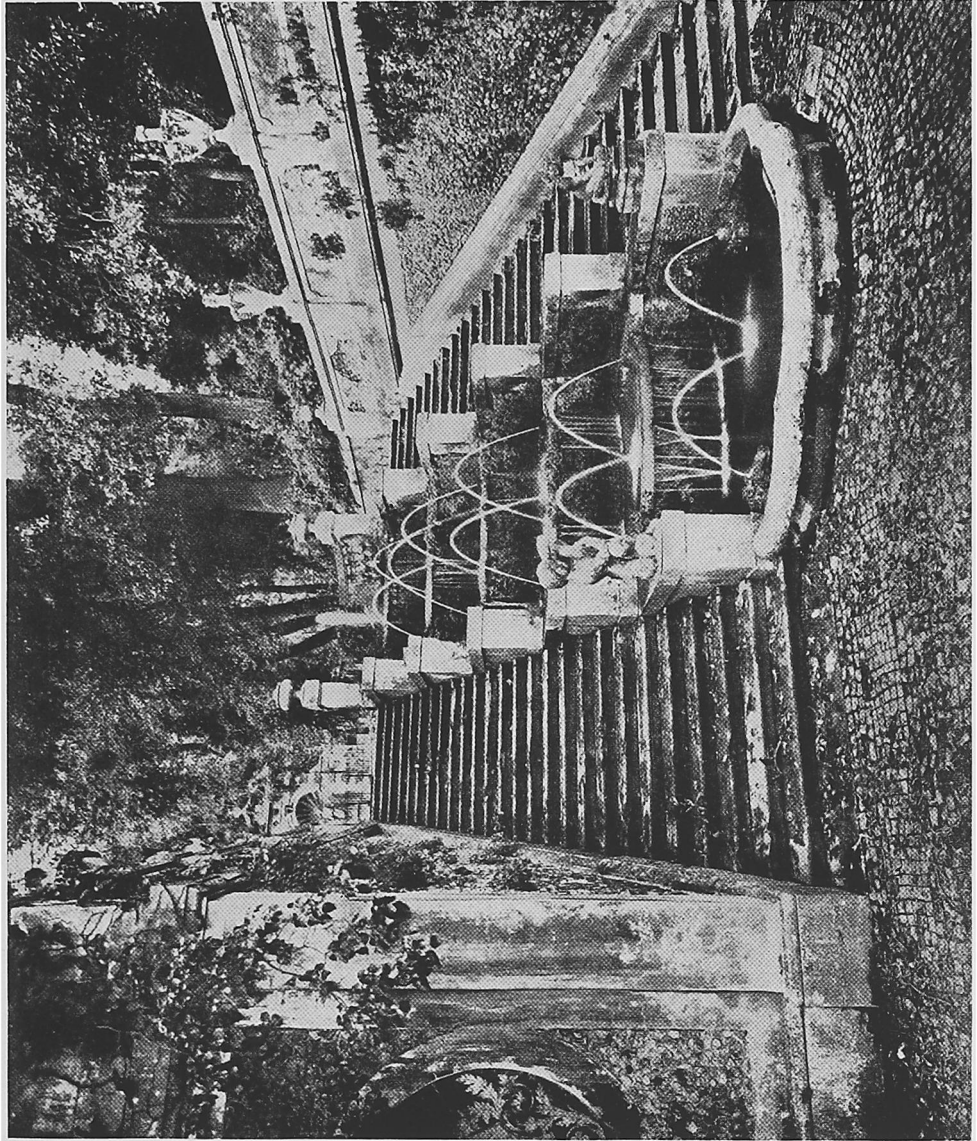
of colour, spacing, and line, it seems the glowing image of some great flamboyant window traced by the sunshine on the grey cathedral floor.

In the *grand parterre* the French craftsman's innate feeling for *mouvement*, his old love for decorative line, found a fresh and congenial means of expression.

As time went on, the level gardens where this skill was best displayed grew larger and larger. At Vaux-le-Vicomte, and among the woods at Chantilly, where Le Nôtre made his celebrated water parterre, French gardening in its grand yet complicated simplicity, in its *prestige du dessin*, reached its height. The size of Versailles marked its decline. The immense scale of the plan destroyed its splendour no less than its charm. The garden, not content with its former boundaries, completely swept over and submerged the park. Its lines stretched out indefinitely, and the whole force of the general effect was lost—a mistake which no magnificence of detail or beauty of ornament could retrieve.

IV

The level French garden depended largely for effect on its woodland background. In the Low Countries, on the other hand, where the boggy nature of the soil prevented the growth of large trees, the Dutch designers did well to restrict the size of their gardens, and to rely almost entirely on the beauty and gaiety of their flowers. In France, too, as in Italy, fountains had become a special feature of the national style, and water was often employed for a purely decorative purpose. In Holland this was unusual, for the Dutch gardens, like those of Spain, were in themselves water-gardens. Where the old gardens of Moslem Spain depended on their *cañerías*, the Dutch gardens made use of their



CASCADE AND ENTRANCE TO THE BOSCA
VILLA CORSINI, ROME

canals. Each type of design grew out of its structural requirements; in one, the water coursed merrily along through ornamented pools and channels raised above the level of the ground; in the other, shrubs and flowers stood high on islands and solid earth embankments intersected by slow-moving waterways and dykes;—if the Spanish garden had to be irrigated, the Dutch garden had to be drained.

From early times the people of the Netherlands were noted for their love of flowers. The Flemings, under the Dukes of Burgundy, rivalled the Provençal knights in the number of strange plants they brought home from Syria and the Holy Land. It is said that the tulip was first introduced into the *vermakhoven*—pleasure-yards—of the Flemish burghers as early as the twelfth century. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the châteaux of the nobles were surrounded by beautiful gardens forming, as a rule, a series of island courts, divided from each other and protected by a chain of moats and fishponds. We can still see, in Jan Vredeman de Vries' designs, published at Antwerp in 1583, how, in these Flemish water-gardens, trellised cloister walks took the place of walls, and quaint high-arched bridges spanned the dykes, where gaily painted barges plied. The curious storks' nests, constructed in a tree about twenty or thirty feet from the ground, shown in the old prints, are customary at country houses in the Netherlands to this day. Even more interesting are the old tree-pavilions, the round banqueting-rooms made of interwoven boughs, and approached by winding stairs, which often occupied the centre of the garden.

The Dutch of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were ardent horticulturists. Some of the earliest botanical gardens in Europe are to be found in

Holland. That of Leyden was started in the year 1577. The soil of the Low Countries, though unsuitable for large trees, grew bulbs and herbaceous plants to perfection, and wealthy citizens and learned men did everything that lay in their power to stimulate and encourage the progress of botany. A ship never left a Dutch port without its captain receiving instructions to bring back all the new seeds and unknown plants he could obtain.

The Dutch settlements in India largely contributed to the supply of new flowers for horticulturists at home. The foundation of the Factory at Surat in 1616 coincided exactly with the commencement of the famous tulip craze in Holland. Enormous sums of money changed hands when the mania was at its height; many of the most precious bulbs coming, as new specimens come to-day, from Kashmir and Afghanistan, and even from further afield in Eastern Persia and Chinese Turkestan.

The cultivation in such quantities of tulips, hyacinths, and narcissus is thought to have started the more general use of cut flowers for the decoration of the interior of the house. Fine specimens of Delft vases, designed specially for their display, are still preserved at the Palace of Hampton Court. But the idea probably originated in the Dutch East. It was no doubt taken from the vases of flowers set round the carpet of state on all festive and ceremonial occasions: a charming Moslem custom which would be familiar to the Dutch settled at Surat, as would be also the Persian and Mughal paintings of flowers.

V

When William III. and Queen Mary introduced the Dutch style of gardening at their palaces of Hampton Court and

Kensington, it was but the last of a long series of changes due to Continental influence. Under the Tudors, English gardeners had learnt from Italy the decorative value of terraces and fountains; the Stuarts encouraged the French multiplication of avenues and parterres. During the short, prosaic rule of the Commonwealth, attention was confined to horticulture, for, beauty being but a snare, gardening as an art was at a discount—useful vegetables were much preferred to vain and ornamental flowers. But with the return of the gay world from exile in France and Flanders, the French taste renewed its sway; until, under the Prince of the House of Orange, Dutch water-gardens became the rage.

But each of these changes was, in itself, a thing of slow growth. English craftsmen then, as now, were never prone to welcome unproved ideas. Throughout each phase some means was always found of making foreign fashions fit the national taste and aims. It was only when this English individuality and adaptability were suppressed and crushed, when the more humble artist-craftsmen were entirely overruled by architects trained to admire the worst excesses of the 'grand manner' as seen on the Continent, and to show the skill of their plans by their size, that the well-ordered harmony of the English house and garden broke down. National taste, ever on the side of moderation and reserve, of sweetness rather than display, of beauty on Menager's 'neatly ordered' scale, revolted at the dull miles of avenues and statues, and parterres so involved that coloured sand ousted their flowers. For all its stately delicacy and precision, French and Dutch design had flagged: it had grown tired. Its method, its system, became intolerable; in gardening, as in other arts, the classical inspiration was

dying out. And soon the 'grand manner' of Versailles, copied at every big and little European Court, seemed to the rising school of Romanticists to be a dull pomposity, and all its dignity of well-drilled flowers and bouquets a mere stage scenery of royalty, a stupid, heartless, tiresome sham.

But the garden having grown so big that it swallowed up the park, the park in revenge now swept over the garden. Soon the chase, with its fine groups of trees, and views of wood and rush-fringed lake-side, was the only sylvan beauty it was proper to admire. From the square, many-windowed block of the late Georgian house, no flowers were to be seen; even the kitchen garden was carefully hidden in a neighbouring wood on account of its necessary but offending walls. 'Le Jardin Anglais,' in whose name so many of the finest Continental gardens were destroyed, was a park and nothing more.

The Gothic revival in England, which transformed the Georgian house, for some reason or other left the park as it was. The flower orchards and quaint enclosed 'vergers' of the Middle Ages seem to have been overlooked and forgotten by the Romantic enthusiasts. But gradually, as the growth of scientific research joined hands with the love of horticulture inherited from the Dutch, the study of botany came again to the fore, and the colour of flowers crept into the green park-like grounds. Round the tight clumps of laurel and rhododendron bushes that closed in the winding drives, or made squat, unhappy islands on the undulating lawns, narrow borders of colour began to make their appearance. Then, growing bolder, the geraniums and yellow calceolarias, with their edging of blue lobelia and variegated leaves, stepped out unsupported on to the grass. These

odd flower-beds dotted promiscuously about were soon seen to be unsatisfactory; besides, they could not contain half the new sub-tropical plants and fashionable flowers; so, to some extent, the terraced parterre or 'Italian garden' was revived. But these Victorian 'Italian gardens' had little in common with their name. Pergolas were unknown in them; stone-bordered pools and fountains were few and far between. The grand simplicity of planting, so noticeable in their originals—where as a rule the most splendid effects were obtained with only four kinds of contrasting trees: stone-pine, cypress, ilex, and plane—was rendered impossible by the taste for specimen trees, 'trees of curiosity,' as they were once called.

Throughout the course of the eighteenth century many new shrubs and trees had reached England from the Farther East, and more especially from China. And the English landscape park is thought to have borrowed something of its irregular character from the accounts of Chinese gardening sent home by missionaries and early travellers. But in the nineteenth century, English gardening undoubtedly owed more to Japan. Apart from the many horticultural novelties introduced from time to time, the flowering shrubs and creepers, the chrysanthemums and Japanese iris, we owe the æsthetic movement of the eighteenthies very largely to the re-discovery of the art of Japan by European artists. It was the æsthetes with their sunflower and their lily who, if at times rather absurd, first drew attention to the crude taste then prevailing in our houses and our gardens. It was the beautiful Japanese art of flower-arrangement that shook loose the stiff little bunches of prized hot-house flowers, with their frills of maidenhair fern, and brought great

branches of blossom into our rooms. To the same cause may be attributed the success of the 'wild garden,' and the charming custom of planting bulbs in the grass, and opening out the shrubberies into flowery woodland glades. Best of all, Japan brought back to view the banished orchard beauties: pink almond blossom with its crimson eyes, snow-white plum and dancing cherry, rose-flushed peach and sturdy moss-grown apple-trees and pears.

It was about this time that 'rock-gardening' came into being, and it is tempting to imagine some connexion between this new phase and the stones of the Japanese style. But in reality they have little in common. The symbolic details of the Buddhist gardener are far removed from the modern Alpine garden, which, like the greenhouse, started life quite prosaically as the best means of growing certain kinds of plants. It is natural that, during a period noted for its marvellous advance in science, what may be called the scientific side of gardening should have received most attention. The recent history of the English garden is entirely horticultural; but, curiously enough, the very progress in horticulture is in turn, through the increasing interest taken in the garden and its house, leading to a renewed study of design. The new rambler roses, in their beautiful varieties, bring in again the treillage and the pergola over which they climb. Alpine plants need a moraine or a rock-garden, with stepping-stones for paths. From this to the walk or court of broken pavement set with aromatic herbs is but a short way to go, and leads almost inevitably to the building of dry stone banks and terraced walls. At the same time, coloured water-lilies, monster forget-me-nots, sweet-scented rushes, and many strange aquatic

plants re-introduce the stone-edged water-garden, with its little rills and pools.

Climate and nationality being the very soul of garden-craft, the genius of the place must always be the garden-planer's chief concern and guide. Instead of such mistakes as so-called 'Japanese' gardens, with stone lamps, bronze cranes, stepping-stones, and all the paraphernalia of Buddhist custom and symbolism totally misunderstood, let us in the West make use of Eastern shrubs and flowers

in our own individual way, learning at the same time from the country of their origin the value of harmony and restraint, the use of tradition in design. Then, at last, we shall hear no more of 'Dutch gardens,' 'French gardens,' 'old-fashioned gardens,' 'landscape gardens,' 'formal gardens,' 'Italian gardens,' and so on and so forth, and a real English garden will be recognised again, one to equal and perhaps surpass the greatest gardens of old time.—*The Edinburgh Review*.

BREAKFAST IN THE GARDEN

BY ISABEL BUTCHART

The China gleams
Where Mary-lilies waken from their dreams,
And roses shed
Their petals red
On amber honey-comb and roll of bread,
A wandering bee
Hums o'er the butter in its cradling leaf,
And suddenly
The fickle northern sunshine hot and brief,
Falling on grey-dewed lawn,
With burning ray
Has driven away
The chill remembrance of the dawn.
Full of grace
This silent place,
Full of prayer
The sunlit air;
The fret of care,
The coming day's unrest,
Are by this one short hour redeemed and blest.

—*Country Life, London.*